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THE NEMASKET HOUSE — BUILT c. 1835

There have been hundreds of histories written about New York City. In three hundred odd years this village of cow paths and ponds has grown to become the greatest metropolis on the face of the earth. This is not news but it is a small fact about which most of us think very little.

Middleborough will celebrate its three hundredth birthday in 1969; it has not become one of the greatest cities in the United States, and only one volume now records its history. This is nothing to be ashamed of at all; some men become Fords and Carnegies, while others serve to the best of their ability.

The New-York Historical Society was born in 1804, and with only a very small group of historically minded people to support its ambitions to preserve the daily news for posterity, has today grown to be one of the most outstanding institutions in the Country. The scope of its collections is national, and yet within its massive walls are preserved thousands of identified artifacts, paintings, prints, manuscripts and other memorabilia that clearly tell and picture the life of the city from infancy.

The Middleborough Historical Association was organized in 1922 by a proportionately small group of people who believed that the past has a bearing on the future. It has survived and enjoyed a far more healthy life than many of its contemporary town organizations in New England. It has preserved in its own small way as much of its history as the New-York Historical Society, provided one is willing to take the handicap of over a hundred years into fair and careful consideration.

But why this long winded dissertation and this egotistical comparison? Merely to justify the work this organization of ours is doing, and to print for the benefit of our community, the members of the Bay State League, and all of the small historical organizations all over the Country an example of what we believe should be done. Too many of us "little guys" stare in awe at the New-York Historical Society's Quarterly. True it is a masterpiece not only of historical record but of literary excellence. We almost bow to such publications issued by hundreds of national, state, county, city and university libraries. Yet we face the same problems and enjoy the same challenges.

Boston, New York, Philadelphia and countless other American cities have lost thousands of their landmarks; some have rescued sketches, plans, paintings and photographs; some have been lost forever. The destruction of the famous Merchants Exchange in New York in the great fire of 1835 was a disaster, but thanks to

our historical societies and thinking librarians the original plans and elevations and paintings have been saved. This magnificent architectural masterpiece still lives, but unless these pictures are reprinted and published for coming generations to see, it will live only in the vaults and archives of the few.

Each community, large or small, that has preserved an artifactual and pictural history in its museum or archives, owes the American public a chance to know why it exists. Which brings us to the photograph reproduced in this issue.

We are indebted to L. Charles Judge for the delightful photograph of the Nemasket House. We are indebted to the Middleborough Gazette for a short biographical history at the time it was torn down in 1939. There is no mention of this grand old building in Mr. Weston's History of the Town of Middleborough.

By December 8th, 1939, the final red tape had been cut away, and licenses for parking lots, gas stations and other technicalities straightened out between the Town Fathers and the Trustees of the Pierce Estate. The die was cast and the wrecking contract let. When today huge cities clean out slums and condemn fire traps I am willing to consider it progress, but too often progress is not very wise in its selectivity.

For nearly a century the old Nemasket House had been a rendezvous of horse traders, commercial men, travelling salesmen and members of the old ten, twenty and thirty cent shows that used to play at the American Hall. What became of the old registers? The account books? Our organization was asleep. There was plenty of warning if one read the Gazette for 1938-9. The battle wasn't quite as drawn out as the one over building the town meeting house in the 18th century, but it was hot and heavy, and we should have known enough to dig them out before the walls fell, the railing or gallery was sold, some of the mantels went to Old Sturbridge Village (through a certain local citizen who used to be in the antique business) and the safe went for old iron.

It was built by Daniel Thomas about 1830 and was run for a long time by Judge Lane, a sporting gentleman and race horse fan of his day. Through the years it was owned and operated by Harry Cushman, Sylvanus Vaughan, Prince Penniman, Tom Sisson and Fred Hammond. During its last years it was listed on many regular schedules for Summer people on their way to the Cape for vacations, but the automobile changed the outlook. As a paying proposition it died a natural death, but as an architectural landmark it could have lived for two hundred years with proper local interest. On the other hand no community, not even New York City, can afford to save more than a very small percentage of what used to be, and in these times of atomic progress, the aged and honorable come last.

We are indebted to Ralph Sampson for further reminiscences. He remembers the days when Fred C. Davis of Buzzards Bay used to take a room at the Nemasket for a week or so at a time during the trapping season. Local trappers brought him all their pelts and did a brisk business. Ralph says you couldn't smell the skunks because of the stables and the horses right by the hotel. He doesn't mention the bar but I will hazard a guess that the bar sold pretty nearly a drink for every pelt.

Many of us remember Adolph Rhot, the hunchback who used to sit on the porch. Ralph tells of the days when Adolph kept his hack and horse in the hotel stables, and met every train. Adolph, when well lit up, enjoyed himself thoroughly. One morning when the Sampsons were living where Ralph Maddigan now has his home, they awoke to find Adolph, hack and horse in the driveway, blissfully slumbering — dead to the world. After one of these sparkling nights some of the boys decided to have some fun. They took Adolph to Soule's Undertaking Parlors and laid him out in a coffin. It's too bad someone didn't stand by with a camera next morning. (Page Horace Atkins).

In the annex that was built on the easterly front of the Nemasket, Middleborough citizens patronized their first A. & P. store, managed by William (Bill) G. L. Jacobs. This was in 1918 when the hotel was on its last legs and Adolph snoozed in the old chair on the porch most of the time.

In 1925 when Fred Hammond operated the Nemasket, he sublet the restaurant management to Mr. Cooke, who proceeded to murder his wife for running around with another man. (Vol. 1, No. 4. Middleborough Antiquarian. **A Business Grows in Middleborough.**) The police records date this last bit of Nemasket excitement April 13, 1925. Ralph closes his notes with the sad truth that old hotels can't talk. The trouble is that this organization wasn't alive when Judge Lane used to trade horses.

LITTLE SCRAPS OF PAPER

If one could travel and visit a thousand historical libraries and museums from Maine to Texas, along the coast back to Florida, across again to Washington, and then back to Maine, (plan your own coverage — it's a large territory) — and spend a week in each, **not** studying the exhibitions and special collections but rather digging behind the scenes in the uncatalogued sanctuaries of the assistants to various titled dignitaries, one might realise that **if** is not the largest word in the dictionary. The largest word in the dictionary is **uncatalogued.**

Although I apply this to the dictionary used by the antiquarian, it is also applicable in the home, factory and office. What earthly use is a tube of tooth paste or a screw driver you can't find? What good is a letter that has been buried in an unalphabetised file? What good is a history with no index?

Americans interested in the preservation of history seem to fall into three groups, the total of all three being perhaps a questionable 3½% of the entire population. As Richard N. Wright President of the Onondaga Historical Association recently wrote me, we need one or two "crackpots" in every town in the United States. The present score shows that we can't even interest one for each of the three thousand counties. Does this mean that all of our currently active organizations should throw up their hands and quit? I think it means that those blessed with such fanatics should give them free rein to work and produce and educate others. We will never lack the progressive element, but we will always be short of those who try to save records of their progress.

This is a long introduction to a simple scrap of paper. I think it safe to say that the trip suggested in paragraph one above might discover several million hidden in envelopes, trunks, car-

tons, wash baskets, museums, libraries and air conditioned vaults. As long as they stay there, they are worthless. Did I hear you say that's a good place for them? You're wrong. If they are worthless, then they shouldn't be carefully preserved because they are costing you millions of dollars every minute of your working day just to have them hidden. If they are worth saving at all, they are worth exhibiting, recording in current print or at least catalogued for the study of history.

In 1710 Seth Morton built a house in what used to be called Morton Town. (Weston's History, page 275.) In 1752 a Dr. Samuel Clark settled in Middleborough, married Ebenezer Morton's daughter and subsequently purchased it. Through the years it has passed through many hands and many changes. It has grown from the simplest Cape Cod type to a hodge-podge of periods containing over twenty rooms. The next chapter for this site is a gas station.

In our small archive we have one letter written by Seth Morton. It seems fitting and proper to print it where it can stand as a record of the year, just two hundred and five years ago, when the builder and owner decided to sell and leave town. If he could see it now he would disown it anyway.

Middelbrough August ye 8 1755.

Brther this is to Let you know that we are Well. I heard thatt you Said it Would be a good Place for Shoemaker In Sandwich and if you think It Will Due for me to com thir I Wold have you hire me a house in Sum convenant Place in the town for I should incline to hire First to see how it wold Sute Be fore I Sold hear I Wold have you hire me a house or a room in a house Send me a leter in a few Days and I will com Down if you think it will due No more at Preasent But I remain yours to Serve

SETH MORTON."

A PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION OF THE PEIRCE PAPERS

by

L. Charles Judge

Some people like to read old accounts and letters to really understand the lives of the people who wrote them; others usually only to grab rare stamps or cancellations. The opportunity of pouring over the hundreds of letters, bills, invoices, orders, receipts and miscellaneous papers concerning the Pierce Store as well as the Shovel Works and other enterprises of Colonel Peter Peirce, has been a rare pleasure. A quotation of ancient prices printed in a history book never has quite the same flavor.

This is only a cursory report; the real work must come later. As rescued from the old barns behind the courthouse, these papers were covered with dust and dirt that had to be almost scraped off. Mildew and the skeletons of once very active spiders and bugs delayed reading. The tidy bundles, carefully put together years ago, were a shambles. Consequently, though the outside letters and papers are in poor shape, many are still as clean as when written.

Although these papers represent the most priceless source material for local history, selection of those that discover important news of the past is difficult. Prices of commodities and labor, methods of travel and communication, and even popular materials for dress reflect the temper of the times. The transition period from sail to steam on the coastal waters is clearly shown. One wonders at the amount of shipping in the ports of Wareham, Taunton and Fall River. Parcel post deliveries were of course by stage from the shipping points.

The Shovel Works did a tremendous business between about 1834 and 1840, shipping to many ports in Maine, Boston, New York and Baltimore — even on Christmas Day. I doubt very much if Sundays were days of rest, law or no law.

Aside from the business, the Colonel had his hand in politics too. When the railroads began to grow he invested heavily in the Fall River Railroad Company and the Cape Cod Railroad.

The earliest bills and invoices in the collection are dated in the year 1818. At this time kitchen ware, nails and food stuffs were the bulk of the business. By 1830 what were then luxury items began to appear, such as stoves, fancy clothes, mirrors, wall paper, school books, paints and hardware of a more sophisticated taste. Firearms were not in stock which seems strange.

Time is short and I can not hope to really exhibit my findings in a few short paragraphs. Perhaps odd excerpts will serve to amuse until the collection is ready to be filed for future research.

1822 To butchering one calf .25c one sheep .42c
11097 bd.ft. of lumber and timber $99.87

1845 Medical attention for my family — 87 visits — $43.50 for the year. Shoeing one horse .80c.

1843 ½ pint of gin for a horse.

1841 Making one pr. pantaloons .90c
Making one jacket for best $2.38

1838 Wall Paper Hangings — @. 04c a roll.

1839 Super Fine Carpeting .85c per yd.
(I thought that word super came in with 1900)

1843 Rum — one gal. .28c. Brandy .40c per gal.

1836 1 dozen horse collars $6.00
2 dozen Palm Leaf Hats — $2.00

This is a far too hasty job. There are so many interesting pictures to be discovered through chronology and continuity. Names like Josiah Stickney and Peter Lorillard stand out and cry for further investigation. At least these records have been saved and we can hope that they will be catalogued at some future date.

ACQUISITIONS

L. Charles Judge, one of our most active and interested members, has just presented us with one of the old hand made leather wood graining rolls. The design is still useable though leather dressing is indicated. (Now where is that assistant curator?) The handles are stubs, broken off long ago. Is this one of the old tools used by Luther Bailey and Thomas Soule in their carriage and buggy manufactory? Is this the only record of the "best buggies of their time" (Middleborough Gazette, 7/21/38) built in

the old building moved from Cedar street to the present site of the New England Cranberry Sales Co. opposite the Little League ball field? Drop in at the library. Then when you next visit Old Sturbridge Village, Shelburne Museum, Cooperstown, Colonial Williamsburgh or Suffolk Museum you'll better understand how American craftsmen created the fetching ornaments during this period in the development of travel.

Contributed by Mertie E. Witbeck after a careful examination of the scrapbooks carefully put together by James H. (Jim) Creedon.

(See Middleborough Antiquarian Vol. 1 No. 1 for a fine view of the old Bay State Straw Works where this pseudo-authoress acquired this philosophy of life.)

STRAW SEWERS

Affectionately Dedicated to my fellow-laborers

Now sew your braid, and sew it well,
Or sew it not at all,
And sew it fast, that you may be
All ready for the call.
If you sew it wrong, it is but right
That you should sew it o'er,
Then sew it well, or else, I fear
That you will get no more.
The laws are strict, but very good,
Oh! why should we complain!
How hard some work to buy their food,
While others strive in vain!
Some say they think the pay is small
But of it they feel sure,
And that you know is better far
Than working for a lure.
Then let us sew, and patient be,
And ever sew in hope, —
When we get rich, why then you know
We all can give it up.

A Straw Sewer.

The Mattapoisett Historical Society was organized in May 1958. We have just received an announcement of progress. In less than two years this group has acquired a museum of its own and received nearly two hundred and fifty artifacts and memorabilia of local origin. The real news in the announcement is the fact that the workers in this association have **catalogued 246 items received from 42 donors.** Whereas this list, close to the hearts of Mattapoisett historians, would not startle our State Historical Society or our Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, the proper cataloguing of possessions for research is a feather for the most experienced cap. I suggest that the hundred and fifty members of our Bay State League take notice. A Bay Psalm Book with corrections by Stephen Daye isn't of much historical value unless you can put your hands on it.

The Onondaga Historical Association of Syracuse, New York, has sent in a small clipping from the Syracuse paper dated March 17, 1863. Since our Weston's History makes no mention of this fact, I include it for future reference:

An Inventor Becomes Insane.—William A. King, one of the leading citizens of Middleboro, has been placed by his friends in the insane asylum at Taunton, Mass. He has been engaged for some months in perfecting a new sewing machine which will take a long stitch on one side and a short one on the other — adapted for sewing braid. His anxiety about the result unsettled his mind.

TO THE BOYS OF CAMP JOE HOOKER

You have gathered to fight for the flag, my boys,
The flag of the gallant and true;
You have sworn to protect that glorious flag,
'Gainst St. George's cross or Secession's rag,
To die in Liberty's van, my boys
For the red, the white, the blue.
You have gathered to save the State, my boys,
The fearless, the brave and the true;
You have left your homes to protect our State;
From hillside and glen, from forest and brake,
You come, and your stand point take, my boys,
'Neath the red, the white, the blue.
You have gathered to save your homes, my boys,
For your hearts are both leal and true;
'Tis for your childhood's happy home,
You've left her door, afar to roam,
To follow the doubling drum, my boys,
And the red, the white, the blue.
For your mother, for me and mine, my boys,
And for her whom your heart holds true.
And our Father, the God of yours and mine,
Guards bivouac, camp and battle line,
And bright shall wave through all time, my boys,
The red, the white and the blue.
Proudly we cheer you on, my boys,
We trust you, the valiant and true!
And cheer for **US** as you march on,
For your mother, your God and Washington,
And three times three for McClellan, boys,
And the red, the white, the blue.

Woodside. Emma E. Brewster

From scrapbook of Mrs. Emily Horton,
Attleboro, Mass.
Loaned by Miss Shirlie C. Clark.
Susan B. Brackett.

When Thomas Weston was compiling his History of the Town of Middleboro, he sent out questionaires. One of the answers stated that Lady Oliver's wine table was in possession of the Peirce family. Further investigation seemed useless until Barbara (Peirce Jenks) Barstow dropped in from North Dakota the other day. The table is curly maple, has travelled with the U. S. Army through thirty-six moves, and is STILL in the possession of the Peirce family! Perhaps some day it may return to Middleborough — even though we call it Middleboro — and maybe — just maybe — it will find a final resting place in our museum in the library.

Lawrence B. Romaine — Ed.

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